

SHEDDING LIGHT ON CYBERVIOLENCE

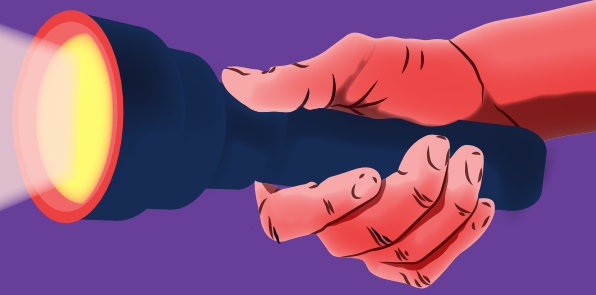


Centrale des syndicats
du Québec

In this digital age, boundaries between our private lives and the public sphere are blurring, transforming traditional forms of harassment. Cyberviolence—be it hate speech, bullying or the non-consensual sharing of intimate content—now poses a major challenge to social cohesion and people’s safety.

This issue is not confined to the virtual world. Its consequences are very real: psychological distress, students dropping out of school and deteriorating working environments. Cyberviolence calls for constant vigilance and concerted action. We all have a role to play to prevent these situations, respond appropriately and support those affected.

It is against this backdrop that the CSQ has decided to focus on this issue. As part of its *Together we see clearly. Let’s act against violence* campaign, it sheds light on cyberviolence and, most importantly, suggests ways of tackling this issue.



RECOGNIZING CYBERVIOLENCE

Cyberviolence refers to any act of violence, committed by an individual or a group, on the Internet or via communication technologies, which undermines the dignity or integrity of a person or a group.

It is characterized by its wide reach, its persistent nature, the difficulty in identifying the perpetrator, and the profound sense of helplessness it can instill in a victim.

Form of cyberviolence	Example
Cyberstalking or bullying	→ Insult → Mockery → Exclusion → Threat
Cybersexual violence	→ Non-consensual sharing of intimate images → Blackmail (sextortion) → Monitoring and harassment (cyberstalking)
Damage to someone’s reputation	→ Identity theft → Creation of fake accounts → Rumour
Blackmail or extortion	→ Threat or disclosure of personal information in exchange for money or favours
Hate speech	→ Discriminatory comments based on gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, etc. (see <i>Shedding light on hate speech</i>)



UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS

Cyber violence is a relatively recent phenomenon, and its medium- and long-term effects remain poorly documented, according to the Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ). Research on this topic focuses mainly on the short-term consequences or those that become apparent in the years following the events.

As cyber violence can affect a person at any time (at school or at home, day or night), sometimes under the cover of anonymity, without the victims being able to defend themselves, experts argue that the severity of the impacts could be greater for young people.

Individual consequences

Cyber violence can lead victims to:

- experience anxiety, stress or symptoms of depression;
- lose self-confidence and see their self-esteem decline;
- adopt problematic behaviour;

- experience emotional difficulties (unusual irritability, mood swings, etc.);
- withdraw socially, experience social anxiety or loneliness;
- miss school;
- feel sad or lose hope;

- experience low satisfaction or a loss of interest in activities they once enjoyed or in life in general;
- have suicidal thoughts or attempt suicide.

Certain warning signs may also indicate that a person is a victim of cyber violence. For example, they may feel afraid or uncomfortable at the thought of using digital devices (phone, computer, tablet), or display excessive emotional reactions when they hear the sound of a notification.



TAKING ACTION AGAINST CYBERVIOLENCE

To effectively stamp out cyberviolence, a comprehensive approach is needed, one that involves our institutions, communities and workplaces, but also each and every one of us.

What should you do if you witness something?

If you witness cyberviolence, it is important to take action, even if the situation does not concern you directly. Your action can help change the course of events.

Here are a few things you can do and some that you should avoid:



- Hold on to any evidence, such as screenshots showing the date and time
- Report abusive content to the relevant digital platforms
- Support the victim, in private, and take them seriously
- Make sure that your intervention does not put the victim at risk
- Refer the victim to a professional for support (psychologist, psychoeducator, social worker, etc.)

- Ensure that the person who reported the situation (if you are not a witness) does not become a target themselves
- Report the situation to a supervisor or to senior management
- Contact the police department in the event of a criminal threat



- Share or comment on hateful content, even with the goal of denouncing it (this helps to amplify said violence)

- Downplay the situation or the victim's distress

Possible courses of action and steps to take

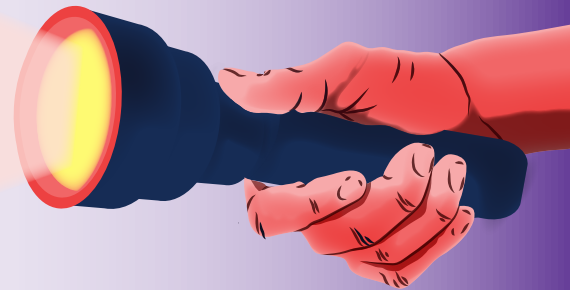
If you work with students, whether in a school or in higher education, there are certain steps you must take.

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| → Report the cyberviolence to the institution's management team; they are obligated to receive such complaints. | → Lodge a complaint using the school service centre's complaints procedure if you consider the provided response as being unsatisfactory. | → Contact your local union if the employer's response is inadequate. |
| → Please consult the <i>Anti-Bullying and Anti-Violence Plan</i> which is mandatory in all schools. | | → Contact the police department in the event of a criminal offence |

What could be classified as a criminal offence?

Cyberviolence constitutes a violation of someone's fundamental rights. Certain actions may also involve a criminal offence and must be reported to the relevant authorities. Here a few examples:

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| → The non-consensual publication or sharing of intimate images (revenge pornography); | → Extortion, blackmail or sextortion; |
| → Hate speech inciting violence against an identifiable group (see <i>Shedding light on hate speech</i>); | → Physical threats; |
| | → Harassment; |
| | → Identity theft. |



What should you do if you are victim of cyberviolence?

Being a victim of cyberviolence can be unsettling, but there are steps you can take to regain control of the situation. Here are some steps you should take, and others you should avoid, to protect yourself and minimize any consequences.



- Temporarily leave the platform where the violence is taking place
- Block the person responsible for the cyberviolence
- Resist the urge to reply impulsively
- Keep all evidence (dated screenshots)
- Talk about the situation with someone you trust

- Notify your manager or senior management as soon as possible
- Report the content to platform administrators
- Report the content to your Internet service provider, if relevant
- Contact the police department in the event of a criminal threat



- Respond in an aggressive or threatening manner
- Share more personal information online
- Delete evidence before documenting it

- Keep the situation to yourself out of shame or fear
- Give in to demands in cases of blackmail or sextortion
- Speak out publicly, which may exacerbate tensions

Protecting your privacy online

Everyone should protect their online accounts and privacy. To do so, first check and restrict the privacy settings of your social media accounts, and limit the visibility of your personal information.

Make sure you adopt good practices too: enable tools to detect harmful content where available, avoid accepting requests from strangers, and regularly sort through your lists of followers.

Finally, use strong passwords and enable two-factor authentication where possible to improve the security of your accounts.



How to prevent cyberviolence and take action

It is possible to prevent and take action against cyberviolence, particularly by strengthening certain protective factors, such as:

- Create a trusting atmosphere where people feel free to speak out without fear of reprisal;
- Develop the social and emotional skills of young people and staff members;
- Adopt a prevention-focused approach throughout the entire community;
- Ensure that everyone is aware of reporting procedures;
- Promote respectful and kind online behaviour;
- Raise awareness of the legal consequences of cyberviolence;
- Act as a role model in the ethical use of digital technology.

Other measures can help prevent cyberviolence and support those affected. Here is a non-exhaustive list that could inspire tangible actions in your workplace and community:

- Organize training sessions on cyberviolence and how to deal with it (see the [Stop cyberviolences](#) program for instance, or the [Institut Pacifique](#) [in French only]);
- Offer workshops on rights and recourses;
- Run digital literacy workshops, such as managing online privacy;
- Update internal policies on cyberviolence;
- Develop clear procedures for reporting and handling incidents of cyberviolence;
- Set up a cyberviolence prevention committee;
- Launch awareness-raising campaigns (posters, videos, testimonials, etc.);
- Promote the [+FORT](#) app (in French only) designed for victims of bullying.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Here are some useful resources to better understand, prevent or take action against cyberviolence:

NeedHelpNow (needhelpnow.ca/en/)

Support service for young people under the age of 18 who have been victims of luring, sextortion or other forms of cybersexual violence.

Email: [online form](#)

+FORT app (centreaxel.com)

A Quebec-based mobile application (in French only), developed by researchers, which offers support to young victims of bullying to help them better understand what they are going through as well as explore strategies to reduce said bullying.

Crime Victims Assistance Centres (cavac.qc.ca/en/)

Front-line services (support, intervention, and legal information) for victims, their families and friends, and witnesses to a criminal offence.

Telephone: 1 866 532-2822

Centre de prévention du suicide (suicide.ca/en)

A confidential professional support service for people who are having suicidal thoughts, those who are worried about a loved one, and those who have lost a loved one to suicide.

Telephone: 1 866 277-3553

Text: 535353

Chat: [Available online](#)

CNESST (cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/en)

The CNESST (Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail) provides information on prevention, health and safety at work, as well as on accidents and occupational illnesses.

Telephone: 1 844 838-0808

Email: [online form](#)

Cybertip (cybertip.ca/en/)

Canada's national tip line to report cases of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, which receives and processes reports from the public and provides information and resources on online safety.

Email: [online form](#)

Éducaloi (educaloi.qc.ca/en/)

An organization with expertise in both legal communication and legal education. It offers information on various topics including cyberbullying, the sharing of intimate images online as well as our legal responsibilities when using social media.

Email: [online form](#)

Institut Pacifique (institutpacifique.com)

An organization that develops and applies its expertise in conflict resolution and teaching of social skills. It offers a range of training programs (in French only), including some designed for school environments.

USEFUL RESOURCES (continued)

Kids Help Phone (kidshelpphone.ca)

An online mental health service for children, teenagers and young adults.

Telephone: 1 800 668-6868
Text: 686868

Stop cyberviolences (stopcyberviolences.ca)

A project, led by a number of partners (community organizations, universities and educational partners committed to child protection), that provides information and training on online issues.

Email: [online form](#)

Tel-jeunes (teljeunes.com/en/)

A free and confidential front-line support service for teenagers and their parents.

Telephone: 1 800 263-2266
Text: 514 600-1002

